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# Effects of Solicitor Variables on Obtaining Pledges to Donate Blood

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IN THE PAST 10 years there has been a heightened interest in altruistic behavior among social scientists. Altruism has been investigated as a personality variable and as social behavior. As social behavior, altruism has been studied in a broad range of social situations among various populations, for example, students, pedestrians, subway riders, and so forth. In the context of social behavior, altruism has been operationally defined as "helping" behavior. Studies of helping behavior are generally concerned with helping in emergencies and nonemergencies (1).

In a study by Latane and Darley (1), subjects, ostensibly waiting to participate in a psychology experiment, heard a woman in an adjoining, accessible room fall off a chair and cry out with pain. Using two social conditions, for example, waiting alone or with others, the authors measured the time it took the subjects to aid the "victim" and if they came to her aid directly or indirectly. An example of a typical study of helping behavior in a nonemergency situation was reported by Isen and Levin (2). They investigated the various social factors that increase or decrease the aid passersby would give to a stranger who had dropped a large number of papers.

Investigations of helping behavior in both emergency and nonemergency situations have largely concentrated on social situations in which the need for help is immediate and where the consequences of rendering or not rendering aid can be immediately assessed. There are, however, many organizations that rely on altruistic or helping behavior in situations where the need for help may not be immediate and the consequences of being helpful are not immediately assessable by the helper. The blood collection center is one type of organization that relies on the altruistic behavior of persons whose help is not perceived as immediate. Helpers or "donors" supply these organizations with a personally precious commodity with little if any tangible reward. The donor understands that usually no financial incentives are available, no personal recognition is given, and only under unusual circumstances can the donor expect repayment in kind. Although it is estimated that in the United States 85 percent of the blood used for

transfusions is obtained from volunteer donors, it is also estimated that only 2 to 3 percent of the qualified population does donate blood (3).

Studies of helping behavior have indicated differences in altruism along sexual lines. Results, however, are such that no clear prediction of altruistic behavior can be made on the basis of sex in different social situations. Piliavin and co-workers (4) concluded that women offer help less often than men in social situations where the social costs are high, such as aiding an apparently intoxicated or ill person. However, it is not known if this finding also occurs in situations that do not involve a number of bystanders.

Some research has demonstrated that the sex or physical appearance of the solicitor may have an effect on obtaining or eliciting helping behavior. For example, Suedfeld and co-workers (5) found that persons who attended a peace demonstration were more inclined to sign a petition when the signature was solicited by a person whose dress implied social similarity to the person solicited. Women were more likely to successfully elicit the name of a person than men, especially when the person was a man, and male solicitors were more successful in obtaining money for subway fare from strangers when the solicitors were accompanied by women (1).

## The Present Study

Because blood collection centers often rely on so-called "blood drives" to gather needed supplies and on solicitors at the site of the blood drive, it is im-

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portant to understand how the individual donor is influenced by the sex or perceived similarity of the solicitor. We investigated the effects of a face-to-face individual appeal for blood donation. The study was designed to compare the success of appeals by male solicitors with those female solicitors. Specifically, three experimental hypotheses were examined:

1. There will be no difference between the number of women who pledge to donate blood and the number of men who pledge.
2. The success of the appeal by female solicitors will be greater than that by male solicitors.
3. The success of the appeal by uniformed nursing student solicitors will be greater than the success by the same solicitors when not in uniform.

## Method

Six male and 10 female undergraduate students served as solicitors for 2 days during a 2-week period on a large midwestern university campus. Three male and five female solicitors were randomly assigned to wear nursing student uniforms on the first day and to wear typical casual student attire on the second day. The other eight solicitors wore student attire on the first day and nursing uniforms on the second day.

The 16 student solicitors were randomly assigned to different solicitation areas on the campus where they alternately approached men and women who presumably were university students. The solicitors were instructed to work rapidly, to approach as many persons as possible, and to make no attempt to evaluate the person in terms of approachability. Each solicitor was to approach 50 persons each day.

The appeal consisted of the following standard verbal solicitation: "The campus-wide blood drive of last month did not meet the need for blood in the community. The blood center needs your help. Will you sign up now to pledge to give a pint of blood this month?"

If the request was refused or ignored, the solicitor moved on to another person. If further information was requested, the solicitor provided it. Following the verbal appeal, the solicitor asked permission to record the name and telephone number of the pledged donor and gave him or her a card indicating the address of the blood collection center and the telephone number to be called for an appointment. When all solicitation was completed, the data were compiled according to the names and responses of persons contacted by each solicitor under each experimental condition.

## Results

Of 1,600 persons approached by solicitors, 471 pledged to donate blood and 1,129 refused. Thus, 29.43 percent of those solicited agreed to donate blood. The data are further broken down by sex of donors and sex and attire of solicitors in the table.

A two-by-two chi-square analysis was performed to determine if the number of female and male pledgers differed. Of the 800 persons of each sex who were approached, 268 men and 203 women pledged to give blood. The difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 12.32$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Data were also analyzed by chi-square to determine if there was any difference in the number of pledges obtained by male and female solicitors. Of 600 solicitations, male solicitors obtained 149 pledges; of 1,000 solicitations, female solicitors obtained 322 pledges. Analysis revealed a significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 9.45$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Thus, women solicited significantly more pledges from both men and women per 100 solicitations. Finally, a chi-square analysis was used to determine if there were any differences in the number of pledges obtained by uniformed and nonuniformed solicitors. Of 800 persons solicited by nonuniformed solicitors, 239 pledged to donate whereas of 800 persons solicited by uniformed solicitors, 242 pledged to donate. This difference was not significant ( $\chi^2 = .43$ ;  $df = 1$ ). Additional analyses revealed no significant interactions between sex of solicitor and sex of donor or between dress of solicitor and sex of donor.

## Discussion

Hypothesis 1, that there will be no difference between the number of men and women who pledged to donate blood, was not supported. Significantly fewer women pledged, even in this situation where social costs were not high. The face-to-face personal appeal for a commitment to donate blood was more successful in approaches to men than to women, although a large percentage of persons of both sexes on this campus did pledge to donate blood.

In a post-study discussion, solicitors reported that often persons who were approached but who refused to pledge appeared to feel obligated to present some reason for their refusal. As the solicitors recalled, the reasons ranged from those who said that they donate regularly and had donated recently to those who stated that they had previously attempted to donate but had been considered unacceptable by the blood center. Other reasons given for not pledging ranged from diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, diabetes, and rheumatic fever to conditions such as being underweight, anemic, frightened, and not having

*Response to requests for blood donations by sex and clothing of solicitor and sex of persons solicited*

Clothing and sex of solicitor	Sex of persons solicited	Response		Total
		Yes	No	
<i>Uniformed</i>				
Men .....	Men	48	102	150
	Women	32	118	150
Women .....	Men	89	161	250
	Women	73	177	250
<i>Nonuniformed</i>				
Men .....	Men	42	108	150
	Women	27	123	150
Women .....	Men	89	161	250
	Women	71	179	250
Total .....		471	1,129	1,600

enough time. It is, of course, impossible to know how many of these reasons were indeed valid and how many were offered to rationalize the lack of commitment to pledge to behave altruistically. Because of the many possible rationalizations available to both men and women who were solicited, apparently those who did pledge to give blood did so because they so intended. Otherwise, they too might have used the rationalization mechanism.

Hypothesis 2, that the overall success of the appeal made by female solicitors would be greater than the success of the appeal by male solicitors was supported. Female solicitors were successful in obtaining pledges from 32.2 percent of the persons to whom they appealed, and male solicitors were successful in obtaining pledges from 24.8 percent.

Hypothesis 3, that the success of the appeal by uniformed nursing student solicitors would be greater than the success of the same solicitors when they were not in uniform was not supported. The data revealed no statistically significant difference in the number of pledges obtained by uniformed solicitors than by nonuniformed solicitors. Evidently the perception of similarity (fellow student) or the perception of dissimilarity (member of a recognized health profession) had no effect upon willingness to pledge to donate blood.

However, post-study discussion with solicitors revealed that many of them felt more confident when they were in uniform, as if the uniform legitimized their activity. They also felt that the persons they approached while in uniform questioned the solici-

tion less and were more likely to reveal their names and telephone numbers without question or hesitation. This attitude is reflected by the low number of women who pledged (and gave telephone numbers) when solicited by men.

### Implications

The results of this study indicate that obtaining commitments is not a major problem for blood centers. The pledge to donate of almost 30 percent of those approached is far greater than the usual 10 percent goal set for blood drives on college campuses. The real question is, of course, how many of the persons who pledge to donate really intend to, and moreover, how many would actually do so during a blood drive. Perhaps some who pledged were undecided, but overtly pledged to appear socially acceptable, to appease their consciences, or to get rid of the solicitor. However, one would not expect this to be so for the majority of those who pledged, because many possible legitimate excuses were available. Perhaps, as in many other areas of life, promises and resolutions are made by persons to themselves or in front of witnesses but are never carried to fruition even when the opportunity is available later.

If it can be assumed that the original intention to donate blood is valid, then perhaps it is important to obtain this commitment at a time that provides the opportunity for transmitting the intention into action. That is, ideally, solicitation for blood donation pledges may be carried out at the time of an area blood drive and when the blood collection agency is located nearby and thus convenient to the person who pledges to donate. Under such conditions, and with female solicitors, it may indeed be possible not only to obtain a large number of pledges to donate blood, but also to transmit the altruistic intention into actual helping behavior, thus obtaining a socially significant number of blood donations.

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